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ABSTRACT

The growing spirit of professionalism of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) is reflected in its increasing representation within the elementary, secondary, and college level sections, its involvement of teachers from all states, and its development of a unified professional voice. NCTE began in 1911, when 35 members of the English Round Table of the National Education Association broke off into a separate organization in search of a secondary school emphasis. In the beginning, the council spoke primarily for high school teachers through the "English Journal." College interests existed then, but it was not until 1934 that the first major publication on college English appeared--"College Teaching of English." The elementary section also held meetings from the beginning, although then, as now, it was interested chiefly in the preparation of teachers and only indirectly in teaching. Initially, the council had a spotty history in representing all teachers in all states, as NCTE remained "midwestern" for much of its first 50 years. The organization also made little effort to involve black teachers from black schools until late in the 1920s. Had council leadership been more sensitive during the 1940s and 1950s to the growing dissatisfaction of reading specialists, the International Reading Association might not have formed as a separate organization. In its efforts to speak for a unified profession, NCTE has established criteria for acceptable teaching conditions, combated censorship, called attention to the latest and best English education research available, and established and maintained high standards for the preparation and certification of teachers at all three levels.
(HTH)

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THE NCTE AND THE PROFESSION

James R. Squire

What are the hallmarks of NCTE's concern with the profession? Which events best reflect the growing spirit of professionalism that has pervaded our basic thinking? As I have time today I concern myself with three basic dimensions as have emerged over the past 71 years—the growth in section representation, the involvement of all members in all states, and the development of a unified professional voice.

THE GROWTH OF THE SECTIONS

Although NCTE today is the major national professional association that represents all teachers in a single discipline—college and university no less than elementary and secondary schools, religious and non-public as well as public, AF of T as well as NEA — it did not become easily thus. Yet the very origin of the council seems in retrospect to have been designed to attract the total profession.

NCTE began in 1911 when 35 members of the English Round Table of the NEA broke out into a separate organization for the purpose initially, it seems, of articulating independently the requirements of the high school against then widespread attempt to establish uniform college requirements. Led primarily by its first secretary-treasurer, James Fleming Hosic, who established the English Journal as a voice for the nascent organization (1912) and within five

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years directed the influential Hosis study, The Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools (1917), the Council from the beginning spoke primarily for high school teachers. The English Journal was the voice of the profession for sixty years, but not until 1954 did the Council purchase it from W. Wilbur Hatfield, the second secretary who had secured the journal from Hosis many years earlier.

College interests existed from the beginning, but actually the period from 1911 to 1941 saw two college sections, a normal school section from 1911-1928, and a teachers college section from 1928-1941. Not until 1934 did the first major publication on college English appear, the College Teaching of English, edited by scholar Oscar J. Campbell. However, records indicate participation in journals and at conventions of leading scholars and creative writers beginning mostly in the twenties.

To respond to the unique needs of college English teachers, a college edition of the English Journal was prepared until 1939, consisting of reprints of pertinent EJ articles plus two or three special contributions of interest only to those in higher education. College English as a separate publication did not emerge until 1939, clearly an attempt to fulfill needs of university members in an organization that too often focused its services on the preparation of teachers. This period also saw the organization of the College English Association to provide a separate forum outside of NCTE to discuss college English requirements. The dissatisfaction with conditions in the Council was intensified by the retreat of MLA members "to the castle," the result of a direct admonition from a distinguished MLA Executive Secretary that scholars be scholars and, in effect, not sully their hands with the needs of the market place

or the schools. In fact, an important need emerged for a forum to analyze critical aspects of college English teaching.

What really saved NCTE's College Section during this middle period were our publications in linguistics and the related leadership from Sterling Leonard, C. C. Fries, Albert Marckwardt, and the young Harold Allen, plus the founding of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 1949. The 4C's began when a group of Directors of Freshman Composition, largely from Big Ten universities, met at the Stevens Hotel in Chicago (John Gerber, the still young Harold Allen, and Charles Roberts were among the conspirators) to formulate plans for an annual conference and publications which provided for an exchange of views not then met through NCTE or outside groups. For more than thirty years this group has contributed much of the strength of the Council's college section but during the early years at least—particularly during the College English–College Education struggles on our campuses during the fifties—the 4C's debated annually the wisdom of leaving NCTE and establishing an independent association. Indeed as late as 1956 only one vote on its executive committee kept 4C's within the Council. The fact that it did not leave and that Council proved sufficiently flexible to accommodate its diverse interests is a tribute to NCTE's leaders of the time. A similar flexibility was revealed during the founding of the Conference on English Education a decade later (1967) and with the creation of Spring Conferences for Elementary and Secondary Sections, The Conference of High School Chairmen, and the Assemblies for those interested in literature. Had our early leaders been this adaptable, the speech teachers might not have walked out in 1916 to form the National Association of Teachers of Public Address. And one can speculate that at least some of the long term indifference of teachers of English to the

requirements of speech education is traceable to the early and continued bifurcation of oral and written language in the profession.

But if College English has been a sometime problem, elementary English has created even greater challenges. Indeed the identification of many elementary teachers only with the term "language arts," coupled with the refutation of this word by college English members only imposes a semantic barrier where real communication problems exist.

The Elementary Section held meetings from the beginning although it seems clear that then, as now, its chief interest was in the preparation of teachers and only indirectly in teaching. For almost two decades, in the elementary schools, elementary teachers lacked a unique voice within the Council. But Elementary English Review appeared in 1929, the creation of C. Certain, not of Wilber Hatfield, and was soon distributed to all members of Section as the official journal. Among its major contributions under Certain's editorship and subsequently John De Boer's and William Jenkins', was interpretation of research in the teaching of English. Indeed, for 55 years, the Elementary-English Review, later Elementary English, renamed Language Arts five years ago, has been the permanent voice of research within the Council. (It is not surprising to find Certain was the first President of NCRE fifty years ago.) Research on the Teaching of English did not appear until 1967.

Helen K. Mackintosh in 1957 was, I believe, the first full time elementary language arts specialist elected as President of the Council. To be sure, many of our earlier leaders like Stella Center, Dora V. Smith, John J. DeBoer, and Lou LaBrant had worked K-12 and in their writing and speaking displayed much

interest and expertise in language development, but Dr. Mackintosh, then Chief of the Bureau of Elementary Education in the U.S. Office of Education, was the first full time language arts specialist to be elected Council President. A significant development, one that so increased the strength of Council leadership and representation on our Executive Committee that by the end of that decade, the rotation of the presidency among the three sections and balance in sectional representation became established as official policy.

Had Council leadership been more astute during the forties and fifties, had our leaders sensed the growing dissatisfaction of "the reading people," who found insufficient outlets for speaking and writing about basic skills within the annals of the Council, perhaps the International Reading Association would never have formed in 1955 or, if formed, it might have been housed with NCTE in Champaign as was once considered briefly by J. N. Hook. Nancy Larrick, and others who tried to prevent the full separation that ultimately occurred.

In retrospect, it seems unlikely that the awesome vitality which became IRA—in mammoth conventions, councils, publications, committees—could have been contained within NCTE without reshaping the direction of the Council. Still the split clearly was initiated along ideational grounds with those concerned with skills, remediation, and testing associating with IRA and those believing in integrated language arts and children's literature sustaining the Council. For a time only a few wise leaders participated actively in both associations (David Russell, Margaret Early, Constance McCullough, Alvina Burrows come to mind). And it has taken twenty-five years for the great dichotomy between reading and language arts to become again as one. In some ways the Goodman presidencies (Ken's and Yetta's) symbolize this new fusion in outlook if not professional association.

REPRESENTING ALL MEMBERS

But if the Council experienced difficulty accommodating itself to three sections, it has had an even more spotty, if sometimes distinguished, history in representing all teachers in our states.

Born and nourished in Chicago, NCTE remained "midwestern" for most all of its early conventions, moving hesitantly at times to Boston and New York and as far South as Chattanooga in 1922. This ambivalence toward territories and states located far from Chicago remained with the Council for much of its first 50 years. As recently as 1957 one past president reminded us that "brains unlike potatoes do not grow better in some sectors of the country than in other". In 1929 it was characteristic of the early times that a western convention in Kansas City was considered a bold and historic departure. Negotiated by Ruth Mary Weeks, Kansas City turned out to be the largest convention to that year and permanently set the pattern for rotating to regional sites. The first West Coast convention occurred in 1947 and twenty years later (1967), the NCTE became the first national association to hold its annual meeting in Hawaii. More than 2,000 members from east of the Mississippi enjoyed their turkey on Waikiki Beach.

Concern with involving black teachers from black schools did not surface until late in the twenties. There appears to have been no consideration of opening the Chattanooga meetings to black teachers in 1922. Separate associations and separate meetings had long since been established as custom in the South. By 1929 in Memphis, however, black teachers met in a separate hotel in close proximity to the headquarters and held separate (but similar) sessions

with Council speakers. Denied access to the main convention hotel, the black group was encouraged to meet on its own and select the four speakers that they most wanted to hear from those on the regular program. Dora V. Smith and Bob Pooley were among those who rotated between the two conventions and, confessed Dora a few years ago, "we really thought we were doing something wonderful." Such has been the progress of social sensitivity in this country that the Council's patronizing efforts in 1929 now seem almost an embarrassment. But they were efforts indeed. Few of our sister associations awakened to the problem for another 25 years.

Concern in the Council was growing. In 1936, NCTE became the first association to publish a bulletin on the uses of literature in furthering intergroup education—We Build Together by black librarian Charlemae Rollins. By 1941 when the Council returned south to Atlanta, members were not willing to see their black friends admitted only to the balconies in the hotel (during the ten years since Memphis, blacks apparently had been admitted into the same buildings for meetings, albeit not to the same floor). The Council then passed the first of several resolutions requiring free access to all hotel facilities for all members. This was reaffirmed in Buffalo in 1949 and Minneapolis in 1957 in a stormy session which saw the Council refuse to take a position on the Supreme Courts' desegregation decision because it was seen as a social issue beyond the responsibility of teachers of English. (This narrow view of social and professional responsibility was overturned finally in the Washington convention of 1969 when Council members no longer could close their minds to social concerns.)

Whatever the consequences, the decision on convention sites held. Not until 1962 in Miami Beach did the Council again return South. But then and in at least one other convention, officers had to work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that hotels did not discriminate in housing and that our local affiliates were fully integrated. But because the Council and many other associations held to absolute standards, convention facilities finally yielded everywhere in this country. In retrospect, the Council can be seen as a leader in this effort.

SPEAKING FOR THE PROFESSION

If representing all members is an attribute of professionalism, so is speaking for a unified profession. The Council's efforts here have been legion. I highlight only a few critical efforts.

Teaching conditions occupied the attention of writers and speakers from the first meeting (see for example, Edwin Hopkin's article in first issue of EJ). Not until 1957 did the Council establish an official policy and calling for four classes and not more than 100 students for the secondary school teacher. This policy not only strongly influenced school boards, but I maintain, influenced James B. Conant who embraced the Council's recommendation in his American High School Today. (But even this national perspective made effective actions difficult. A teaching load of 100 students actually represented an increase for some private school members.) Statements on the need for a reduced work load for the college teacher followed in 1966, for the elementary school teacher in 1967. Subsequently, all have been revised and reiterated. In 1979 the Council created SLATE (Support for Learning and Teaching English)

to take appropriate political action to improve conditions at the National and State levels.

Struggles against undue outside influence on the teachers of English repeatedly has occupied attention. You will recall the emotional impetus for the Council was desire to speak against rigid college requirements. One early imbroglio (1944) was a committee attack on the editorial position of the Reader's Digest, so inflammatory that Digest attorneys threatened suit if the report were adopted by the Board of Directors. It wasn't. The official records suggest that both pro-Digest and anti-Digest speakers lacked objectivity and the study was returned to committee.

To publish critical studies expressing such views beyond the length of an article, the Council needed a publication program. But not until Stella Center became president in 1932 was action taken to initiate such a professional voice. Her method says much about the close involvement of members with their Council in that day. Dr. Center personally wrote 1500 friends and asked them to contribute one dollar each to start the publications. With these funds and a long term agreement with Appleton-Century-Crofts, the Council auspiciously began its efforts with Sterling Leonard's Current English Usage (1933).

Censorship must have created problems early in the Century. It is not a new problem for our schools. But it was not until 1953, during the McCarthy era, that Censorship and Controversy first appeared, or that almost annual resolutions affirming the rights of teachers and students to select their own materials can be readily identified. The influential Student's Right to Read was first published in 1962 and, with hundreds of thousands of reprints and copies

circulated through our schools, may be the most widely distributed of any Council statements.

Reports on the status of English teaching have had a dominant role throughout our seventy years. He who controls the facts controls thinking about the facts. The Hosis Report (1917) and Smith report (1932) were both sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education but were largely publicized through Council. In 1961 the National Interest and the Teaching of English helped to persuade Congress to extend the National Defense Education Act to include English and may have been the first Council publication to be reprinted in its entirety in the Congressional Record. In 1966, the National Study of High School English Programs directed attention to actual conditions and urgent priorities. And this year, Arthur Applebee's report on Writing in the Secondary School (1981) persuades us to look again at writing across the curriculum. Given the mileage that NCTE obtains from factual data of this kind, the significance of centering the English/Reading EKIC Center in Urbana can scarcely be overstressed.

Calling attention to the latest and best research is critical in any profession that would grow, and Council's record here has been especially strong during the past 25 years when research itself has been strong. From early dependence on reviews in Elementary English and monographs prepared by The National Conference on Research in English, the Council created a Research Foundation in 1960 to support small studies, established a distinguished series of research monographs (beginning in 1963), "placed" Nick Hook (& Cotes, Erwin Steinberg, and John Gerber) as National Directors of Project English, created a David H. Russell award (in 1965) for Distinguished Research,

established an English and Reading ERIC Center (in 1967) to evaluate and report on new studies, created Research in The Teaching of English in 1967, began a program of recognizing promising new researchers in 1970, and has continued an important series of convention training sessions for at least the past decade. In addition, key research reviews like Richard Braddock's State of Knowledge About Comprehension have been among the most influential of Council publications. And the NCTE itself, through its leadership, has been regularly invited for help formulate national policy in USOE and NIE and on occasion to administrate special R&D grants like that which first defined the role of the English Department Heads (1966).

Finally, but perhaps first in importance in professional service, have been efforts to establish and maintain high standards for the preparation and certification of elementary, secondary schools, and college teachers.

The first separate bulletin on preparation and certification (a bibliography of articles) appeared in 1957 but as early as 1919, 1928, and 1935 reports on inadequate preparation were presented to our college section (one by the youthful Harold Allen.). Then as now teachers seemed to lack preparation in language and composition and perhaps in literature for children and adolescents.

A Committee on Preparation and Certification, established in 1955, has met continuously since that time and monitored developments in state certification. A short-lived Commission on the Profession (1957-1962), under the leadership of Brice Harris, focused largely on improving teacher preparation and initiated pre-convention workshops (1959) and discussions at

the convention with affiliate leaders (1959). Resolutions, selected articles, at least two status studies, the Continuing Education of Teachers in 1964, TENES on bilingual-bicultural programs in 1966 (prepared by the still youthful Harold Allen) led to participation in devising the guidelines of the national English Teacher Preparation Study in 1967 with several outside organizations. Nor has the preparation of college teachers been neglected. Volume 5 in the English Curriculum Series (1962) devoted one-third of its text to the college teaching and lamented especially the lack of attention to instructional concerns in doctoral programs in English.

TODAY AND TOMORROW

This then is NCTE and the profession—more than 100,000 members and subscribers, three sections, two conferences, four assemblies, six commissions, in excess of 30 committees, more than 50 affiliates, and an annual publication list that grows and grows and grows. To the national concerns received here have been added matters international through a series of conferences (Boston 1965, Dartmouth 1966, Vancouver 1967, York 1970, Milbourne 1980) and an assembly and an external coordinating committee that regularly direct attention to international issues.

The 35 members at the English Round Table in 1911 might be surprised at how active professionally we have become. But I think most of them would be pleased and proud. And all of them would be impressed by the fact that the eternally youthful Harold Allen was (as late as this morning) still sharpening our ideas and focusing our attention to matters of critical professional concern.

James R. Squire
November 16, 1982